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SOME NOTES ABOUT ART, CODE, AND POLITICS UNDER CLOUDY EMPIRE(S)

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1

As we watch the Internet dissipate into the endless network of things it becomes ever more important to recall the digital manifestations that occurred only a few clicks ago in the 1990s in order to grasp the question of art as code, code as politics now. The practices of network art, new media art, (net art/net.art)/software art, and tactical media were deeply enmeshed to wider network culture that started to spread with the development of the web browser (Mosaic 1993) and e-mail platforms. What is important about these two things is not the platform as technology, or as code, but the cultures that emerged as multiple social fields that new media art(s), code, and politics encountered and expanded as a wide-ranging performative matrix. It was the multitudes that gathered around networks, specifically their cultures, and not the technology itself that allowed for new frames of political art and social interventions by artists to be created. For artists the web browser was cultural readymade ready to be unmade, disturbed, rerouted, remixed, and pushed into the streets and back again. For artists who sought to develop work that would shift the digital ground between algorithms, the spirits of new capitalism(s), or neoliberalism(s), and the global social dramas that networked communities offered were continually growing and changing during the 1990s.

By 1994 you were just two clicks away from military sites, activist networks, all kinds of list servs, porn sites, art sites, news sites, financial trading companies, gaming communities, hacker groups, early online shops, blogs, software and hardware developers, dating sites, universities, and many many more expected and unexpected cultures. The early encounters between new media artists and the politics of networks, code, algorithms in the new connectivity cultures were to create gestures to disturb, subvert, and perhaps exit the savage bubbles of wired capitalism(s) that were being constituted as the only possible political economy for globalization that organized production and distribution of wealth needed to seize on scientific and technological developments. At the same time artists and artivists were routing into anti-anti-utopian spaces of hyper-shared commonism(s) creating possible out-lines of post-capitalist networks on, in, and at the edges of these networks. These gestures played in many fields and have many names and aesthetic practices—but here are a few key terms: artivism, tactical media, counter-apps, minor simulations, utopian plagiarism, conceptual poetries, hacktivism(s), new media theater,

softwhere, border code disturbance art/technologies, augmented realities, speculative cartographies, queer technologies, transnational feminisms and code, digital Zapatistismo, dislocative gps, and intergalactic performance, etc.

2

A number of artists working with network art (net art/net.art)/software art attempted to create projects under the sign of aesthetic disappearance, to become unstable objects as vacuoles of non-communication—which signaled that for net art to be political art it must stay under the radar and stay deep inside networked cultural channels, mimicking them completely. But another signal was also at play in the 1990s: the ontologies of being hyper-present, of the being all-too-clear, all-too-visible to all networked cultures. Electronic Disturbance Theater (EDT) pushed forward a form and practice of Electronic Civil Disobedience (ECD) that needs to be understood as the visible manifestation of the always/already present channels connecting data bodies to real bodies on the streets and online, because the dichotomy of digital/physical was a false one, at least to our social aesthetics and our politics of code. ECD involved a number of physical components, from the hardware that the webpage is displayed on and the JavaScript it runs on, to the human body that activates that code. The bodies participating in ECD "are on the radar!", which is to say, the myth of anonymity does not apply to EDT's aesthetic practices of ECD. The performative matrix of EDT constructs more fluid forms of embodiment—participants in a virtual sit-in are not necessarily restricted to the same rules and protocols of gender, sexuality, race, or religion that they may experience as everyday body—so that the gestures of these trans_bodies (with the use of any of these relational systems of communication, from a webpage to a cellphone) expose these bodies' visibility without the baggage of identity. Trans_bodies are the visible moment of virtual potentials, real bodies becoming augmented things with surprising new organs that can circumvent the oppressions of the logistical assembly line called savage neoliberalism(s) or top-down globalization.

In the last footnote of Felix Guattari, *An Aberrant Introduction*, author Gary Genosko focuses on the question of potential derelict spaces or hidden gestures that serve as a parasite on the flows of globalization and networked capital. In an interview with Antonio Negri, Gilles Deleuze addressed the issue of resistance to such ceaseless control, even though he wasn't especially hopeful:

> Computer piracy and viruses, for example will replace strikes and what the nineteenth century called 'sabotage' ('clogging' the machinery). You ask whether control or communication societies will lead to forms of resistance that might reopen the way for a communism understood as the 'traversal organization of free individuals.' Maybe, I don't know. (Deleuze 1995: 175). This opens a space for the innovation of the multitude, a concept that marks a passage from group to subject, through assemblage, and beyond in its formation as posse or the figure of the new militant armed with tranversal tools (Hardt and Negri 2000: 413). Against the hegemony of communication, Deleuze raised this idea: 'The key thing may be to create vacuoles of non-communication, circuit breakers, so we can elude control.' A kind of creativity that was not linked to communication but broke it at some point by establishing cavities through which its messages could not pass or, to put it in positive terms, passed all to well.[1]

While these cavities may indeed offer a type of processual aesthetics of new media that can manufacture dynamic practices that are unseen by the forces of assembly line software or code

flows (because they mimic those flows), it is equally if not more important to create gestures that rupture the invisibility of the digital assembly line, as EDT aims to do. We make visible what is hidden in the code's own gaps and cracks via 404 files/Files Not Found (which is a core part of EDT's and ECD's browser-based tactics); one strategy, for example, includes reloading the question, "Is Democracy found on this.gov site?", which elicits the response, "404_Democracy is not found on this site." At this point in time the velocities of leaks of information also become part of a similar practice. The traversal action shift the tactics of invisibility to one of direct presence as a core aesthetic of non-communication that becomes all too clear.

3

We are all walking in data clouds now, where everything that is solid melts into the Wi-Fi air. Into the Cloud Empire. We are all now the locative artifacts that Willam Gibson writes about in his 2007 novel *Spook Country*, that describes locative art as the aesthetic move to monumentalize the holographic dead. In Gibson's vision of the Cloud Empire, we are all the augmented realities of the dead River Jude Phoenix or F. Scott Fitzgerald. In *Spook Country*, the characters, perhaps like us, now travel between all that is lost to "cartographic attributes of the invisible" and the specific coordinates of our locative realities. Everything is falling between the cracks of hypertagging and the wave-point edges of new recombinant realities in the novel, a sentiment that is perhaps best expressed by curator Odile Richard when she notes, "The artist annotating every centimeter of a place, of every physical thing. Visible to all, on devices such as these."[2] At the same time, Gibson's locative media's machines can bring forth the dead and the lost before our eyes and despite the efforts of the spook-state.

The state machine is a spook-system that utilizes indeterminacy in its strategies of control and coercion. These strategies move from anticipatory 'pre-emptive strike' police and military action through to 'softer' media strategies that utilize the affective politics of fear. In each case, the spook-state attempts to colonize the virtual to get to the real, or, we might say, to harness the strange temporality of the event—an event that fractures the fractality between the virtual and the actual—to manifest the locative perversity of those living and breathing beyond the holographic graveyard. Let us then consider the aesthetic event-based technology of EDT's Transborder Immigrant Tool's performative matrix as a way to divert the flows of disappearance toward the mythopoetic space of the un/accountable presences of the all-too-human bodies crossing the borders of the world. The mythopoetic is about slowing down hypermedia and the habit of always being switched on, about attuning data bodies to the slow digital Dasein that is always/already linked to locations that cut and paste the borderscapes around us—the deep cuts that move across the event of mutant desires and against the abstract machine toward gestures that have a name: trans_bodies trans-creating borderless realities now.

In *Spook Country* one of the characters never sleeps under the same GPS "grid" twice for fear of linking his body to his GPS body. The trans_border body never sleeps under the same border or the same "grid"—but it does need the same sustenance and trans_rights as the trans_linked bodies that TBT imagines as part of its geo-poetic-system: a gps that can dislocate the utopian and dystopian conditions of the GPS locative "grid." Drew Hemment in 2004 wrote on nettime, the on-line critical media list serve:

> Locative media exults in the pleasure of locating and being located, and finds in this the basis for an emergent sociality-driven not by marketing but by networks of reciprocity and trust-as well as new ways of representing, relating to and moving in the

world. Just as it contests the top down approach of conventional cartography to open up a manifold of different ways in which geographical space can been countered and drawn, so in appropriating and re-functioning positioning or tracking technologies, locative media indicates how they may be used not for pinning down but for opening up. In dispersing interventions and applications outside the state-and corporate-led technology push, it transforms a system of domination into a participatory milieu. And in bringing location and the coordinate system into the foreground, by examining location-aware experience or perception and its relationship to the dominant logics of representation, it creates distortions or moments of ambiguity by which mechanisms of domination become both apparent and less certain. This does not yet allow a simple opposition to be made between locative media and surveillance or control. Locative media remains upon the same plane as new forms of pervasive surveillance, and this is a plane upon which emancipation and domination intertwine. It is not a simple question of emancipation _or_ domination, but of both at once. In many ways the locative utopia _is_ the dystopia of total control.[3]

The both/and or the either/or of locative grid can escape the code of total control only by dislocating the technological effect with aesthetic affects that become something other than code—a performative matrix that fractalizes and reverses the disorder of things with excessive trans_bodies acting from the in_side_out of that enforced borderless border; that is, a performative matrix that assembles new empirico-tran(s)cendental forms of multi-presence(s) incommensurable with the capitalist socius of the Cloud Empire. As the Zapatistas say, "We do not move at the speed of technology, but at the speed of dreams."

4

The work of EDT is to create experimental art that probes the conditions of post-Fordist factories of the "no-place" by making gaps leak beyond its networked (post/super)modernity and to make them perform their desire to be hidden for all to see, to create art that forces the Cloud Empire to stutter its demands and to measure the glitches in the currents of the Cloudy Empire around us, to stage its overwhelming need towards imperceptibility as the secret code behind code, and to capture its 'majoritarian being' as the imaginary manifest destiny of this floating interactive-state-machine via our speculative deployments. Art as blind probings. The Cloud Empire demands that everything should participate in software culture in order to organize the infinite databases and to establish a standardized setting or an exact market relation between real bodies and data-bodies. This standardization is the key strategy for a functional production-consumption-subjectivation diagram. What escapes this execution by code? Perhaps a gesture that performs the dislocative poetry of precarious trans_ontologies, as well as a demand for the distributed presence of each unique trans_body without database clouds—against that post-Panoptical data-body without a person as the only identification of singularity. Giorgio Agamben points to this condition in his article,"Identity without the Person" (2011):

> The more the citizens of the metropolis have lost intimacy with one another, the more they have become incapable of looking each other in the eye, the more consoling the virtual intimacy with the apparatus becomes (an apparatus that has learned in turn to look deeply into their retinas). The more they have lost all identity and all real belonging, the more gratifying it has become for them to be recognized by the Great Machine in its infinite and minute variants: from the turnstile of a subway

> entrance to an ATM machine, from the video camera that benevolently observes them while they enter the bank or walk down the street to the apparatus that opens the garage door for them, all the way to the future obligatory identity card that will recognize them at any time and any place for what they inexorably are. I am here if the Machine recognizes me, or at least, sees me; I am alive if the Machine, which knows neither sleep nor wakefulness, but is eternally alert, guarantees that I am alive; I am not forgotten if the Great Machine has recorded my numerical or digital data.[4]

The Cloud Empire is a neo-futurist syndrome that only targets non-machinic-identity as illegal, non-llegal, or (a)llegal—a syndrome that functions as a machinic traversal of the fantasy of a total algorithm of control. Trans_bodies risk exodus by crossing the desert(s) of the real; as well, they risk never arriving because their arrival cannot fully happen under the gaze of the invisible biopolitical zones of the border. The trans_body fractalizes the porous paradoxes of globalized walls-without-laws and confronts the post-panoptical power that it is itself always/already escaping and slipping beyond; it is violently imperceptible and rejects any sustenance for any body at any level. But the trans_bodies do not give up; they only accelerate the civil war with queering counter-inventions of artivism.

5

The channels of neo-modernity and global industrialization are redesigning reality as relational objects, as a network of things: iPad desires, texting transgressions, data-powered clouds, airport scan-bodies, and Facebook economics—what we will call the almost-fully emerged Cloud Empire, whose logistical capture-objects arrive before our optical nerves and fingers. They are designed fragments built in pieces in one place, put together in another, and delivered via multiple routes after repackaging. This same logistics governs the flows and protocols of trans_bodies—their borderscapes, their movement towards an extra-legal formation, their territorial remixing, their counter-computational processing, their new modes of desire, and their methods for crisscrossing (by foot, by boat, by Photoshop document, or by becoming the most wanted/unwanted labor bodies demanded by the global market). These trans_bodies form the largest flowing non-national state on the planet. The flow of 80 percent of goods for the global market are at any given moment in transit and this massive transit of goods is equal to the flow of the trans_bodies that are crossing borders everywhere, that are coming and have come—who are forced to sacrifice their rights, their bodies, and their kinships to the "just in time" flow of the Cloud Empire. Whether becoming trans_bodies as post-post-citizens or dead bodies in the desert (s) of the real, these bodies are part of the overdetermined assembly line of the world. This reterritorialization of the endless assembly line traces out a map of connections between things and humans as they become border_things. Perhaps these strange encounters between logistical objects, trans_bodies, and the sovereignty of the assembly line over the nation, might also offer clues as to what the future of the trans_bodies might look like: multi-node citizens moving beyond the borders of the Cloud Empire's objects in flow.

6

Metaleak cultures now are leaking forth swarms of hacktivist ECD actions in defense of what EDT has named since 1998 as radical transparency—an urgent call that has by now become the antagonist of superstate machines like Google, Master Card, Visa, and Pay Pal (all of them now part of the emerging Cloud Empire). Radical nodes are attempting to take on and disturb the

mega-datacenters of the Cloud Empire in the tradition of EDT's aesthetic call to action for the multitude to become utopias of disturbances, blockage and trespass, by staging ethico-aesthetic virtual sit-ins. Of course the difference between EDT and the current hacktivism is that EDT is and has always been radically transparent, always connecting its data-bodies to the location of its real-bodies. Everyone knows who we are, where we are, why we are doing the gesture, whereas the Wikileak hacktivists are hidden and do their work in secret, making no attempts to connect data-bodies and real-bodies (at odds with the radical transparency of leaking secrets put forth by Wikileak activists, Manning, or Snowden). But this is a minor issue when compared to the command and control of information that is enabled when the atavistic state machine joins the neoliberal Cloud Empire. What is clear is that a cold civil war is growing between the Cloud Empire and trans_bodies on the borders everywhere. While it is easy to imagine this as a civil war between clouds, to do so would risk thinking about space without location, reproducing the opaque tactics of invisibility. Once more EDT 1.0/2.0/b.a.n.g lab call for being there as immaterial formations that confront power face to face(lessness) without fear. But, we do understand that in some spaces and times the violences of the Cloud Empire are so imminent that it is foolhardy to expose oneself as a target. In a civil war on a planetary scale, it is (and will continue to be) important to understand who and when one should be seeing—but if one has a choice, it should be with the aesthetic zeitgeist, we are here, and we are less than the one and more than the many.

In *Introduction to Civil War* (2010), the French group Tiqqun articulates the following:

> Imperialism and totalitarianism mark the two ways in which the modern State tried to leap beyond its own impossibility, first by slipping forward beyond its borders into colonial expansion, then by an intensive deepening of the penetration inside its own borders. In both cases, these desperate reactions from the State – which claimed to encompass everything just as it was becoming nothing–came to a head in the very forms of civil war the State claims preceded it.

This "nothing" that preceded the everything of Cloud Empire(s) is forming in the midst of an ocean of data. In fact, data is floating on and within the ocean (it is also interesting to note that the ocean has historically been a core condition of empire). Google now has oceanic data centers to support the new Cloud Empire; these data centers solve the problem of heat build up by exposing millions upon millions of processors to tidal waters. The Cloud Empire(s) is only part of Google's efforts to offshore its critical infrastructure. Those old cyber borders are unraveling, as well as the conceptual borders of the super-state machine, against all trans_bodies. The Cloud Empire(s)'s core computing system is absorbing more and more social and economic media on expanding planetary scales. As these scales give data jurisdiction over what can cross the world and how fast things can go, those things like trans_border bodies and old citizen formations lose rights before the power of end-user agreements. Then a new civil war waged by trans_border bodies against the Cloud Empire is not about supporting the link between territory and state to jurisdiction and law, but about how trans_bodies are moving from illegal bodies to extra-legal post-things, with the full rights of post-human flows and deep locative articulations of place. The first trans_bodies to call for a planetary civil war were the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico in 1994.

7

Now we are no longer in log-on cultures, but always-on cultures and the aesthetics of disturbances are now about shifting a new stage of social embodiment of data-bodies that some

artists have named the post-digital. Where the protocol functions as streams of control over disciplinary, apps or programs, scraping over torrents, meta stacks over stacks, gaming over games, real-time over time, and cloudy societies over private societies, synthetic biopolitics over biopolitcs, nano-markets over micro-markets, dronology over ontology, and objects-in-disappearance over the appearance-of-objects, just to name of few of the binaries at play now. Artists who seek to deploy gestures at the edges of the current recombinant theaters of post-contemporary cultures must re-frame or dislocate the meta-ecologies of bio-hyper media with its endless stacks and stacks data-on/in-bodies in relation to others and objects that are enfolding the planet by any means necessary. To exist and dislocate towards trans_bodies that activate the co-creation of a sharable commonism, a nano-commonism, of a realism without infinite debt. Instead to manifest trans[]infinities of new materialism(s) whose soul purpose is to be shared. An ecology for all things becoming objects that desire only to connect and be shared in common.

8

It is always good to go Back to the Future to understand post-future. Here is a note I wrote in 1998:

> The Zapatistas say:
> Ya basta! Break the Mirror! Do you really need Maps!*

Maps (A Long Footnote)

> Several different maps of information have been put on the block for our inspection: frontier, castle, real estate, rhizome, hive, matrix, virus, network, plug-in your own, etc., Each map creates a different line of flight, a different form of security, and a different pocket of resistance.

Frontier

> A digiscape full of drifters, free roaming data cowboys, mail tribes, code ranchers and bandwidth barons. ISP justice decides the laws for their community. Those that go beyond the local enclave's limit are on their own in a lawless infinity. On the frontier the only security one has is that of a few trusted URL's, one's faithful machine, and keeping the VirusScan loaded and close by at all times. On the Frontier: It's every link for itself and Google against all.
>
> Resistance on the Frontier: Banditos! We don't need no Stinkin' Badges!

Castles

> This is a space of bunkers and transcendental hierarchies, with moats, high walls, and drawbridges. Movement between these bunkers is done by Knights, bearing the latest war gear, protecting the flow of messages and goods. The most important defense of A Castle is the amount of "Air" between the outside and the castle's core. For Castles it is the roads between them they fear. Anything could be lurking in the dark woods.
>
> Resistance between Castles: Robin Hood! Steal from the Rich and Give to the Poor!

Real Estate

This is similar to where you are now, as you read or hear these words. Space is owned or rented by individual transnational-companies, and anything in-between. Lots of big signs selling things, gentrification of homes for senior citizens, the endless streams of the homeless. Everyone wants laws to protect the welfare of exchange under the sign of social control. They say they want to protect the children. In this space, only the commodity is protected.

Resistance under the For Sale Sign: Squat the Future! Burn the sign down!

Rhizome

Here Bodies without Organs schizflux between roots, pop-up flora, holes and machinic desire. Endless tendrils criss-cross space, some spaces become hard and never move again, some spaces become smooth and never crack, nothing escapes the virtual struggle between The State and The War Machine. Here, endless interconnectivity rules all possibility as an either/or line of flight-territorialize or de-territorialize, you have no choice.

Resistance at the root: Become a body with organs and smell the flowers.

The Hive

A wave-system so tightly bound that no difference resides among each segment of the wave. Each segment is part of a wave-mass, A SWARM. The Hive is able to absorb any change both within or without the SWARM. Each segment-wave functions as a SWARM, alone or apart from the other segments. Each element of a SWARM functions locally in parallel interdependence with the rest of the wave mass. The Hive and the SWARM act as one, but only in one direction. Each shift in the SWARM becomes a part of the HIVE at the same moment. Each segment of the SWARM is a part of the HIVE, but the HIVE is not a part of the SWARM. Each segment of SWARM needs the HIVE to be a part of a SWARM, but the HIVE does not need any specific segment of the wave-mass to be a SWARM.

Resistance among the SWARM: Use the SWAT! Act Alone.

Matrix

Weaving symbionts creating, moving, offering the permanent revolution of Pandora's code. The Matrix is disequilibrium as invention, aphanisis as informatic-quanta, soft accidents, and action as care. An alien politics of the body as hope. Still the Matrix is sweating in the labor pools of speed production. The matrices are held hostage as the base materialism of Late Captial. Wetware for the endless multi-tasking of chaotics. The Matrix is still looming.

Resistance in The Matrix: Have a Party! Go on Strike!

Virus

Bio-agents flow between complexity and containment, diversity and control, self and other. Cellular circuits know the difference between antigens and antibodies. Viral

coagulation filters for non-self types in the Host in order to assemble possible defensive patterns. Bioagents fail the Host when it meets its other as self. It has no defense against itself, or what mimics its own messages. Bioinformatics understand the self and not the other as self.

Resistance within the cell: Make a Vaccine! Stick a needle in a meme!

Network

Borderless operables, hyper-redundancy, massive aggregate throughput built on endless backplanes bring bottlenecks down to 0. Decentralized bottom up architectures, mega-gigabit ethernets, and active response firewalls are the multiple nexus of this space. Intelligent infrastructures allow the emergence of total networks, micro-networks, and weak links. Network security is being exploited by the demand for open transnational e-commerce and intercontinental exchange routes. Exploit scripts scan vulnerabilities, replacement files wrap packet filters, stealth sniffers generate new holes: linsniff.c, sunkill.c, and latierra.c. Network gaps created by military-intelligence systems, trans-corporate movement, software developers, end users, providers, and the lack of centralized management clog the possibility of an effective and total security solution.[5]

Resistance on the Network: Disconnect! Take to the Streets!

Notes

1 Genosko, Gary. Felix Guattari: *An Aberrant Introduction* (2002), p. 227

2 Gibson, William. *Spook Country*. Berkley, 2009. p. 22.

3 Hemment, Drew. "The Locative Dystopia."nettime. January 9, 2004. Web: (http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-0401/msg00021.html).

4 Agamben, Giorgio. "Identity without the Person". *Nudities*. Stanford University Press (2010).

5 Kroker, Arthur and Marilouise, eds. "Resistance on the Network! Take to the Streets." Available online at http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=203. November 18, 1998.